Keonjhar, Koraput, Phulwani, Rourkela and Sambhalpur telecom districts of Orissa.

(c) BSNL has taken up the matter with Department of Posts for expansion of this scheme across the country including the State of Orissa.

Media Lab Asia

1189. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Media Lab Asia (MLA) was launched during June, 2001;

(b) if so, the details including the collaborators, proposed duration of the project and the amount estimated for the same;

(c) whether any of the Indian Scientific Community suggested the need of this project;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) if not, the source of originating this project;

(f) whether $ 5 million was proposed for using the name "Media Lab Asia";

(g) if so, the details thereof; and

(h) the present status of the project and the amount of work done to facilitate access to information in rural areas?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI SU. THIRUNAVUKKARASAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Media Lab Asia programme started as a joint effort of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA and the then Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India. The programme was conceived in two phases: a one year exploratory phase, followed by a full scope programme of nine years. A budgetary outlay of Rs. 65 crores was approved for the exploratory phase of the programme.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) A technical committee was constituted by the Government in June, 2000, which concluded that there was a need to set up a world class R&D laboratory in collaboration with MIT Media Lab, as it has an established brand name. It was felt that such a lab would serve the interest of India and Asia by leveraging technology for the service of the common man. Subsequently, a Joint India-MIT Task Force was set up in November, 2000. The Task Force recommended immediate setting up of Media Lab Asia.

(e) Does not arise.

(f) No, Sir.

(g) Does not arise.

(h) The Government has approved the full scope programme of restructured Media Lab Asia for a period of nine years with effect from May, 2003.

Media Lab has identified the following key research initiatives:

* Bits for all: to provide law cost, high bandwidth wireless connectivity.
* World Computer: to develop affordable computing and communication access devices.
* Tomorrow's Tools: to develop sensors and interfaces for rural applications.

Research laboratories at five IITs, namely, Delhi, Mumbai, Kanpur, Chennai and Kharagpur have taken up several projects in these thrust areas. Pilot deployment has been carried out for some of the projects. Notable among these are: deployment of multi hop wireless network to provide rural connectivity, development of innovative vehicle mounted access points to wireless network, Linux based geographical information system for handheld computers and research on low cost testing tools for deployment in the rural environment.

Media Lab Asia programme

1190. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Media Lab Asia programme, a collaborative venture with the US based MIT was called off in May, 2003;